



U.S. Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

**14 DEFENDANTS INDICTED, INCLUDING THE ENTIRE ADMINISTRATION OF
THE COLOMBO ORGANIZED CRIME FAMILY**

***Colombo Crime Family Boss, Underboss, Consigliere and Captains Are Among the
Defendants Charged with Labor Racketeering, Extortion and Money Laundering***

Earlier today, in federal court in Brooklyn, a 19-count indictment was unsealed charging 14 defendants, including 10 members and associates of the Colombo crime family of La Cosa Nostra and a member of the Bonanno organized crime family, with various offenses including labor racketeering involving multiple predicate acts of extortion conspiracy, attempted extortion and extortion, extortionate collection of credit conspiracy, extortionate collection of credit and money laundering conspiracy. The charges in the indictment against the Colombo crime family members relate to multiple charged schemes in a long-running effort by the crime family to infiltrate and take control of a Queens-based labor union (the "Labor Union") and its affiliated health care benefit program (the "Health Fund") that provides medical benefits, including dental, optical and pharmacy benefits, to the members of the Labor Union, and to a conspiracy to commit fraud in connection with workplace safety certifications.

Among those charged with racketeering are Andrew "Mush" Russo, the boss of the Colombo crime family, Benjamin "Benji" Castellazzo, the underboss, and Ralph DiMatteo, the consigliere. Alleged Colombo crime family captains Theodore Persico, Jr., Richard Ferrara and Vincent Ricciardo are charged with racketeering, along with soldier Michael Uvino and associates Thomas Costa and Domenick Ricciardo. In addition, alleged Bonanno family soldier John Ragano is charged with loansharking, fraud and drug trafficking offenses.

Thirteen defendants were arrested today in New York and New Jersey and are scheduled to be arraigned via videoconference this afternoon before United States Magistrate Judge Taryn A. Merkl at the federal courthouse in Brooklyn. Vincent Ricciardo was arrested in North Carolina and will be arraigned before United States Magistrate Judge David C. Keesler in federal court in Charlotte. DiMatteo remains at large.

Jacquelyn M. Kasulis, Acting United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York; Michael Driscoll, Assistant Director-in-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office (FBI); Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent-in-Charge, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, New York Region (DOL-OIG); Patrick J. Ryder, Commissioner, Nassau County Police Department (NCPD); Dermot F. Shea, Commissioner, New York City Police Department (NYPD); and Margaret Garnett, Commissioner, New York City Department of Investigation (DOI), announced the charges and arrests.

“Today’s charges describe a long-standing, ruthless pattern by the administration of the Colombo crime family, its captains, members and associates, of conspiring to exert control over the management of a labor union by threatening to inflict bodily harm on one of its senior officials and devising a scheme to divert and launder vendor contract funds from its health care benefit program. In addition, for their own enrichment, the defendants conspired to engage in extortionate loansharking, money laundering and fraud, as well as drug trafficking,” stated Acting U.S. Attorney Kasulis. “This Office and its law enforcement partners are committed to dismantling organized crime families, eliminating their corrupt influence in our communities and protecting the independence of labor unions.”

Ms. Kasulis also thanked the U.S. Department of Labor, Employee Benefits Security Administration, Atlanta and New York Offices (DOL-EBSA), the Nassau County District Attorney’s Office and the Department of Justice’s Organized Crime and Gang Section for their valuable assistance in the investigation.

“Everything we allege in this investigation proves history does indeed repeat itself. The underbelly of the crime families in New York City is alive and well. These soldiers, consiglieres, under bosses, and bosses are obviously not students of history, and don't seem to comprehend that we're going to catch them. Regardless of how many times they fill the void we create in their ranks, our FBI Organized Crime Task Force, and our law enforcement partners, are positioned to take them out again, and again,” stated FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge Driscoll.

“An important mission of the Office of Inspector General is to investigate criminal allegations relating to organized crime and their illicit influence over labor unions and their affiliated employee benefit plans. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to investigate these types of allegations,” stated DOL-OIG Special Agent-in-Charge Mellone.

“The indictment of 14 defendants, including members of the Columbo crime family on labor racketeering, extortion and money laundering charges should send a clear and concise message that these types of crimes will never be tolerated by law enforcement. By infiltrating and taking control of a Queens-based labor union and its affiliated health care benefit program these defendants were able to extort a substantial amount of money which should have been used for the members of the union. These benefits included medical, dental, optical and pharmaceutical. Congratulations to all of the investigators and their affiliated agencies on a job well done during this extensive investigation,” stated NCPD Commissioner Ryder.

“This indictment is another example of the NYPD’s long-term commitment, working with its law enforcement partners, in making sure those accused of organized crime are held accountable. I commend those who carried out the investigation as well as the office of the United States Attorney for the Eastern District in New York for its work in ensuring there is justice in this case,” stated NYPD Commissioner Shea.

“Every time construction certifications are faked, every time bogus records are created and used to manipulate the facts, building in this City is undermined and New Yorkers' safety is compromised. This investigation is evidence of how corruption can erode the integrity of construction in New York City. And these charges reveal how DOI is working with its law enforcement partners to uncover and stop the illegal conduct,” stated DOI Commissioner Garnett. “DOI thanks the City Department of Buildings for reporting allegations related to this conduct, and the Office of the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, the FBI, and the Office of Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Labor for their partnership.”

As set forth in the indictment and other court documents, the defendants and their co-conspirators committed a variety of crimes – including extortion, loansharking, fraud and drug trafficking – on behalf of the Colombo organized crime family. First, the Colombo crime family’s administration, including Russo, Castellazzo and Dimatteo, as well captains Persico, Ferrara and Vincent Ricciardo, used extortionate means, including direct threats of bodily harm, to control the management of the Labor Union and caused it to make decisions that benefitted the Colombo crime family. Since approximately 2001, Colombo captain Vincent Ricciardo and his cousin, associate Domenick Ricciardo, have collected a portion of the salary of a senior official in the Labor Union (“John Doe #1”) by threatening to harm John Doe #1 and his family. At the direction of the Colombo crime family’s leadership, beginning in late 2019, the defendants broadened the extortion effort to force John Doe #1 and others at the Labor Union and its affiliated Health Fund to make decisions that benefitted the Colombo crime family, including by forcing them to select vendors for contracts who were associated with the Colombo crime family. The defendants sought to divert more than \$10,000 per month from the Health Fund’s assets to the administration of the Colombo crime family.

For example, on June 21, 2021, in a consensually recorded conversation, Vincent Ricciardo threatened to kill John Doe #1 if he did not comply with Vincent Ricciardo’s demands. He explained that John Doe #1 knows, “I’ll put him in the ground right in front of his wife and kids, right in front of his f----g house, you laugh all you want pal, I’m not afraid to go to jail, let me tell you something, to prove a point? I would f----g shoot him right in front of his wife and kids, call the police, f--k it, let me go, how long you think I’m gonna last anyway?”

Further, Colombo crime family members Russo, Castellazzo, Dimatteo, Ferrara, Persico, Vincent Ricciardo, Uvino joined with defendants Thompkins and Bellantoni, among others, to devise a scheme to launder money from Health Fund contracts and payments through third parties and eventually to the Colombo crime family’s leaders. The defendants attempted to re-bid Health Fund vendor contracts for claims administration, pharmaceuticals and other health services to persons and companies affiliated with the defendant Joseph Bellantoni. Bellantoni and others agreed that in exchange for the new vendor contracts, they would pay kickbacks to the Colombo crime family and would use various intermediaries to hide the payments.

The indictment also charges Bonanno organized crime family soldier John Ragano with leading a scheme to issue fraudulent workplace safety training certifications. As alleged, Ragano operated two workplace safety schools in the New York area that claimed to provide Occupational Safety and Health Administration's ("OSHA") training courses and certifications, along with various New York state certifications, to construction industry workers. Rather than provide training, Ragano along with his business partner John Glover and Domenick Ricciardo, falsified paperwork to the U.S. Department of Labor and other government agencies which represented that hundreds of workers had completed required safety courses when in reality they had not. Instead, various defendants used Ragano's "schools" to conduct meetings involving members of La Cosa Nostra and to store illegal drugs and fireworks.

Vincent Ricciardo, Uvino, Ragano and Costa are also charged with loansharking. As alleged, these defendants participated in extending and collecting on extortionate loans totaling \$250,000 to an individual identified as "John Doe #2." The defendants charged and collected a weekly 1.5% interest rate that did not reduce the principal owed and divided the proceeds between themselves. Further, Vincent Ricciardo, Ragano, Costa, Glover and Vincent Martino were charged with conspiracy to distribute marijuana by transporting large shipments of marijuana in vehicles from New York to Florida. Vincent Ricciardo and Costa were also charged, as previously convicted felons, with possessing and transporting ammunition, and Persico, who is currently on federal supervised release following his release for a prior racketeering conviction, was charged with lying to federal court officers about his dealings with other Colombo crime family members.

The charges in the indictment are allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. If convicted, the defendants each face up to 20 years' imprisonment.

The government's case is being handled by the Office's Organized Crime and Gangs Section. Assistant United States Attorneys James P. McDonald and Devon Lash are in charge of the prosecution.

The Defendants:

ANDREW RUSSO (also known as "Mush")

Age: 87

Glen Head, New York

JOSEPH BELLANTONI

Age: 39

Massapequa, New York

BENJAMIN CASTELLAZZO (also known as "Benji")

Age: 83

Manahawkin, New Jersey

THOMAS COSTA

Age: 52

West Islip, New York

RALPH DIMATTEO

Age: 66

Merrick, New York

RICHARD FERRARA

Age: 59

Brooklyn, New York

JOHN GLOVER

Age: 62

Queens, New York

VINCENT MARTINO

Age: 43

Medford, New York

THEODORE PERSICO, JR. (also known as “Teddy”)

Age: 58

Brooklyn, New York

JOHN RAGANO (also known as “Bazoo” and “Maniac”)

Age: 59

Franklin Square, New York

DOMENICK RICCIARDO

Age: 56

Franklin Square, New York

VINCENT RICCIARDO (also known as “Vinny Unions”)

Age: 75

Franklin Square, New York

ERIN THOMPSON

Age: 53

Franklin Square, New York

MICHAEL UVINO

Age: 56

Garden City, New York

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 21-CR-466 (ARR)